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Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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Recent Soviet Leadership Speeches: Political
and Policy Significance

Summary

The round of legislative election speeches given by top-ranking Soviet leaders in February provided strong evidence of the disruptive impact of General Secretary Chernenko's health problems on Soviet politics and policies. Changes in election-related protocol rankings, for example, suggest that Chernenko's illness has increased pre-succession maneuvering. These rankings indicate that Mikhail Gorbachev, the party's unofficial second secretary, has widened his advantage over Grigoriy Romanov, one of his presumed rivals for Chernenko's post. Meanwhile, Moscow city party boss Viktor Grishin is associating himself more closely with Chernenko, perhaps to establish himself as a champion of the Politburo's old guard and an alternative candidate to become the next general secretary. [redacted]

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The frequency with which Chernenko was mentioned and the praise lavished on him suggest that his Politburo colleagues, despite their concern with his health, currently are not inclined to replace him as general secretary. He nonetheless does not appear to enjoy solid leadership backing. His strongest support, to judge from the variations in the praise he received, still is concentrated among the Politburo's elders, and he has failed to win the enthusiastic backing of younger leaders

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promoted during Andropov's tenure. The same barometer suggests that doubts about Chernenko's ability to resume a more active role are undermining his support among such former allies as Ukrainian party chief Vladimir Shcherbitskiy and Georgian party leader Eduard Shevardnadze. [REDACTED]

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The speeches also suggest that preoccupation with political succession may be causing Soviet leaders to mark time on domestic policy issues. References to the consumer goods program, which Chernenko had strongly backed and which was to have been completed by the end of last year, indicate that it is still in the drafting stage. A program for improving economic management, which was reported to be in preparation last year, was not even mentioned. There was no reference to Chernenko's previous announcement that an upcoming Central Committee meeting would be devoted to a discussion of science and technology. This silence lends credence to reports that precedence is being given to preparing for the next party congress, which may be held late this year, and to conserving Chernenko's energies for the party's most essential political business. [REDACTED]

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On the foreign policy front, Soviet leaders from both ends of the political spectrum seemed to move closer to center. Ukrainian party leader Shcherbitskiy toned down the strong criticism of the United States that has marked many of his past statements, while party secretary Gorbachev, who has usually taken a less harsh line, cast doubts on the seriousness of US intentions at the upcoming arms control talks. In some cases, this strategy may have been adopted to enhance the "tough but reasonable" image the Soviets are trying to project as they prepare for the talks in Geneva. Shcherbitskiy, for example, probably did not wish to appear too antagonistic on the eve of his current visit to the United States. Others, however, may have altered their stance because it served their own political interests to do so. Gorbachev, in particular, may have been intent on enlarging his constituency. [REDACTED]

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Elections to the Supreme Soviets of the Soviet republics occur every five years. The results are predetermined, but the regime devotes considerable attention to the process, with each member of the Politburo and Secretariat delivering a speech in his assigned electoral district. These speeches typically cover

a broad range of domestic and foreign policies and provide a useful index to leadership thinking on key political issues. The electoral campaign also provides an opportunity for foreign and domestic observers to gauge the political standing of individual leaders; the number of honorary nominations each leader receives and the order in which the leaders speak are among the best indicators we have of their rankings in the hierarchy. (See table at annex.) The accolades accorded the general secretary by his colleagues also provide a measure of the strength of his political support and serve to identify his allies and detractors. [redacted]

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Chernenko's Status

By 1 February, when party secretaries Nikolay Ryzhkov and Yegor Ligachev began the round of leadership speeches, Chernenko had been absent from public view for more than a month, and numerous Soviet officials had acknowledged in private that he was seriously ill. Throughout the election campaign, however, the other leaders conveyed greetings from him to their constituents and implied that he had recently spoken with them. [redacted]

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Chernenko was unable to appear for his own election speech, which was read on his behalf by an unnamed individual, and it was publicly announced that he had chosen not to appear upon the recommendation of his doctors. Still, as the election campaign closed, Soviet television viewers were shown a film clip of Chernenko appearing at a "polling station" to cast his ballot. The attempts to keep Chernenko's name and face before the public show that the Politburo is, as yet, unwilling to replace him as general secretary [redacted]

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The treatment accorded Chernenko in his colleagues' speeches also suggests, however, that his poor health may have led some of his former boosters to reassess their political loyalties. For example, First Deputy Premier Geydar Aliyev's speech, according to Pravda's account of it, was less effusive in its references to Chernenko this time than during last year's round of speeches for election to the USSR Supreme Soviet (the national legislature). The same was true of the speech by Georgian party leader Shevardnadze, a longtime Chernenko supporter. Ukrainian party chief Shcherbitskiy also seemed somewhat cooler toward Chernenko than he was last year. [redacted]

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*The findings in this memorandum are based chiefly on the versions of the speeches that appeared in Pravda. Longer versions, which sometimes appear in the newspapers of the locality where the speech is delivered, had been received by the time of writing only for Gorbachev, Shevardnadze, Shcherbitskiy, Chebrikov, and Romanov. [redacted]

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The leadership speeches also suggest that Chernenko has failed to win the enthusiastic backing of younger leaders whose careers had advanced during Yuriy Andropov's tenure as party chief. In comparison with other leaders, Ligachev, Ryzhkov and KGB chairman Viktor Chebrikov were sparing in their praise of Chernenko. Ryzhkov said only that Chernenko was making a "great personal contribution" to the party's work, and Chebrikov failed to make any positive reference to him. [redacted]

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Chernenko was not without supporters. Members of the Brezhnevite old guard--such as Moscow city party chief Grishin, Kazakh party leader Dinmukhamed Kunayev, and Vice President Vladimir Kuznetsov--were fulsome in their tributes, describing him as an "outstanding figure of the party and state" and praising his leadership qualities. Grishin offered the most glowing praise, calling Chernenko a "purposeful, principled man of great industry" and a "leader of the Leninist type," complimenting him for his "profound knowledge, ability, and exactingness," and noting his "benevolent attitude and personal modesty." [redacted]

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Other Leaders

The election campaign saw a further improvement in Gorbachev's status in the leadership. He and Tikhonov received more nominations--12 apiece--than any other leader except Chernenko. Gorbachev also was given a constituency in Moscow, a status symbol not accorded to other recent "number two" party leaders. His speech received extensive media coverage, and in a gesture signaling his special status, was attended by fellow Politburo member Grishin and Central Committee Secretaries Ligachev and Ryzhkov. Other than Gorbachev, only Chernenko and Tikhonov had other members of the leadership in attendance at their election speeches. [redacted]

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Gorbachev's succession prospects received another boost when senior party secretary Romanov, a potential rival for Chernenko's post, spoke before Party Control Committee Chairman Solomentsev, thus apparently slipping in the leadership rankings. Solomentsev and Russian Republic Premier Vitaliy Vorotnikov are the most recent additions to the Politburo. Although Solomentsev's party position might allow for higher standing than his junior Politburo rank would normally justify, it can hardly explain his outranking Romanov, a senior party secretary. [redacted]

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Grishin managed to capture the media spotlight by capitalizing on his role as nominal "host" to the top three leaders--Chernenko, Tikhonov, and Gorbachev--all of whom have Moscow constituencies. He also made the announcement that Chernenko would not be delivering his speech, and he showed up at Chernenko's side when he cast his vote. By coming forward as Chernenko's closest associate, Grishin may have been moving to

establish himself as a champion of the old guard and signaling a willingness to contest Gorbachev's bid to become the next general secretary. [redacted]

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Economic Policy

Soviet leaders gave less attention to economic issues in this year's speeches than they did last year. Most leaders focused on uncontroversial subjects, such as the campaign to save labor and materials, and avoided specifics when dealing with the potentially divisive issues of economic reform and resource allocation priorities. All speakers portrayed the last two years as particularly good ones in economic terms. Even sectors of the economy that have been perennial laggards--transportation and construction--were accorded some kind words. Romanov, Aliyev and party Secretary Vladimir Dolgikh sounded the only discordant notes, pointing to the slow pace of raw materials extraction, particularly fuels, as a serious problem area. [redacted]

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The speeches provided few hints about resource allocation decisions for the next five-year plan. Romanov, the overseer of defense industries, said that the Soviet party and state would "continue to show tireless concern" for strengthening defense capabilities, while Gorbachev merely assured his audience that defense was being maintained "at the proper level." Such differences in tone make it difficult to determine what decision may actually have been made on the issue of defense spending--especially in the absence of the late Defense Minister Ustinov, whose representation of both party and military interests made his statements on defense issues more definitive than most. [redacted]

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The speeches also shed little light on the regime's investment plans. All leaders, major and minor, spoke with one voice on the urgency of accelerating scientific and technical progress in order to achieve intensive growth. Most, however, did not go the next logical step and link this to the need for a boost in investment growth. The exceptions were Gorbachev and Romanov, who pushed for more resources for machine building, as they did last year. No mention was made of Chernenko's announcement in November 1984 that an upcoming Central Committee meeting would be devoted to science and technology. This omission lends credence to reports that precedence is being given to preparing for the next party congress, which may be held late this year, and to conserving Chernenko's energies for essential political matters. [redacted]

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Soviet leaders were united on the importance of improving living standards, with Chernenko and Tikhonov being the strongest consumer advocates. Rather than promising an increased resource commitment in all consumer-related areas, however, they indicated that resources would be concentrated on selected targets such as housing, education and health. Progress on the consumer goods

program was variously characterized as "being worked out" (Kapitonov and Aliyev) and "being completed" (Gorbachev). According to US Embassy sources, the leaders have so far been unwilling to give the program enough resources to make it impressive enough to promulgate. Several speakers admonished consumers that they would have to "work better to live better."

[redacted]

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Most leaders gave little attention to agriculture and even less to the new long-term land reclamation program that was the subject of a Central Committee meeting held last October. Gorbachev, who is responsible for overseeing agriculture and has been highly critical of land reclamation in the past, failed even to pay lip service to the program. The program was mentioned only by Chernenko, Dinmukhamed Kunayev, the party boss of a region strongly dependent on irrigation, and by Dolgikh, Demichev and Solomentsev, leaders with no responsibility for agriculture. The latter three may have alluded to the program simply to demonstrate their support for Chernenko. Premier Tikhonov, an ally of Chernenko's, made no mention of land reclamation but did refer to the importance of the October meeting.

[redacted]

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All of the major leaders vaguely noted the need to improve economic management, and most claimed that the "five-ministry experiment," a limited expansion of enterprise autonomy launched in 1984, is yielding positive results. Ryzhkov, who as party secretary for economic management would presumably develop and present any new reforms, emphasized that the purpose of the five-ministry experiment was to give enterprises greater economic autonomy "within the framework of our centralized plan-managed economy"--a remark that is indicative of the leadership's reluctance to embark on bolder reforms.

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In contrast to the election speeches of a year ago, the speakers no longer claimed that reform is one of the prerequisites for a successful transition to intensive growth. Their remarks also lacked the sense of urgency conveyed last year, when work was reported to be in progress on a "program for the comprehensive improvement of the entire management mechanism." This program was not mentioned at all in this year's speeches although Gorbachev said that improvement of the economic mechanism and management is "on the agenda."

[redacted]

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Foreign Affairs

The speakers who dealt with international issues almost all focused on the upcoming Geneva arms control talks with the United States. In doing so, leaders from both ends of the political spectrum seemed to move somewhat closer to center. For example, Ukrainian party chief Shcherbitskiy refrained from expressing the strong criticism of the United States that has marked many of his past statements, probably to avoid clouding the atmosphere for his

current US visit. Instead, he cited recent remarks by Chernenko that success in the talks requires good will and expressed the "hope" that the United States would act accordingly. [redacted]

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On the other hand, Gorbachev, who has taken a less harsh line in the past, expressed strong skepticism about US intentions toward the Geneva talks, perhaps in an effort to enlarge his political constituency. In an effort to drive a wedge between the United States and its allies, he also paid tribute to the "good sense" of West Europeans in wanting to prevent their and Moscow's "common home" from being turned into a "firing range" for the Pentagon.

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Foreign Minister Gromyko, who devoted the most attention to the talks, was particularly skeptical regarding US intentions and critical of US policy. He alleged that "certain US circles" were trying to achieve military superiority over the USSR and that US plans to militarize space undermined the prospects for success in Geneva. On the other hand, Gromyko set no preconditions for the talks and did not state, as he has in the past, that they would be jeopardized by continued US deployment of INF missiles in Europe or by further US testing of ASAT components. [redacted]

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Romanov, who treated international affairs at great length, described the current state of East-West relations as "extraordinarily dangerous," a characterization that TASS watered down in its English-language treatment of his speech. He also alleged that Western efforts to attain military superiority had brought mankind "close to the brink of thermonuclear catastrophe." Still, Romanov was restrained in his comments on the Geneva talks and claimed that the USSR is ready for "the most radical decisions." [redacted]

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Boris Ponomarev, a candidate member of the Politburo who oversees the Central Committee's International Department, claimed the USSR is prepared for "radical" steps in Geneva, but expressed greater skepticism than Romanov as to US intentions. He said that the United States was lying when it claimed that its research related to the Strategic Defense Initiative was not threatening to the USSR. Perhaps to embellish the achievements of his department, which is responsible for relations with communist parties in the West and dealings with the non-communist left, Ponomarev spoke repeatedly of the "increasing" strength of the antiwar movement. [redacted]

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Chernenko presented the most upbeat assessment of the prospects for reaching an agreement at Geneva. Unlike several other leaders, he refrained from charging that the United States was not sincere in its approach to the talks and from attacking the US position on the Strategic Defense Initiative. Moreover, he averred that despite a divergence of views between the two sides and "gloomy forecasts," which he disavowed, agreement is both "necessary" and "possible." [redacted]

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Several speakers who discussed international affairs concentrated on issues other than the Geneva talks. KGB Chairman Chebrikov and party Secretaries Petr Demichev and Mikhail Zimyanin--all of whom have special responsibilities for ideological matters--stressed the need for Soviet citizens to be vigilant against "subversive" efforts from outside. Chebrikov devoted particular attention to this theme, alleging that there was a widespread Western campaign of "ideological sabotage." Addressing his constituents in Vladivostok, Chebrikov also paid particular attention to Soviet relations with countries of East and Southeast Asia, declaring that the USSR favors further progress in Sino-Soviet relations--a point also made by Chernenko. [redacted]

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Political Issues

All speakers touched on the importance of strengthening discipline and law and order, goals strongly associated with the Andropov period. Chernenko pledged full compliance with the discipline campaign, while acknowledging that much remained to be done. Some of the toughest statements on the subject, however, were made by leaders whose careers prospered under Andropov--Aliyev, Gorbachev, Romanov, Vorotnikov, and Solomentsev. [redacted]

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Almost all the leaders shied away from the more sensitive issue of corruption in high places, a problem that Andropov had tackled but that has been dealt with only fitfully during Chernenko's tenure. According to the version of his election speech printed in the Georgian press, Georgian party chief Shevardnadze said that voters had refrained from renominating some unnamed incumbents "because of errors, serious oversights, and failings committed by them." Gorbachev was quoted in a local Moscow newspaper as warning that strict discipline would be "expected for all" and that "no exceptions" would be made. The fact that these passages were struck from Pravda's account of the speeches suggests that some Soviet leaders considered them too pointed. [redacted]

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All speakers referred to the upcoming 27th Party Congress, but only Shevardnadze said that it would be held this year, as several recent reports have suggested. Most speakers also mentioned that a new edition of the CPSU program would be approved by the congress. Grishin said that the program was being drafted under Chernenko's "direct leadership." Chernenko himself went further than any of the others in alleging progress, claiming that preparation of the program was "entering the final stage." This remark seems to be consistent with recent reports that a Central Committee meeting soon will be convened to set a date for the congress and unveil the party program for public discussion. [redacted]

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Few Soviet leaders made reference to plans to discuss possible amendments to the party rules. Chernenko had raised this subject in a speech last October, but he made no mention of it in his

election speech. Party Secretary Ligachev was the only leader to indicate what the general thrust of the rule changes might be. According to Ligachev, "additions to the party rules should serve to consolidate discipline, which is severe and equal for all communists...." Their silence on this issue suggests that others in the leadership, particularly members of the old guard, may see such changes as possible threats to their own positions.

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Political Standings of Soviet Leaders as Revealed in 1985 Election Speech Schedule*

Last Year	This Year	Comment
Chernenko	Chernenko (in absentia)	Topmost slot, as expected
Tikhonov	Tikhonov	Traditional slot for premier
Gorbachev	Gorbachev	Senior secretary under Chernenko
Ustinov		Died on 20 December 1984
Gramyko	Gramyko	Foreign Minister...top ranking government leader after Premier Tikhonov
	Kuznetsov	Candidate member of Politburo...spoke out of turn this year due to illness
Grishin	Grishin	Moscow party leader...continues to outrank other regional chiefs
Romanov	Solomentsev	Heads party discipline unit...unusually high ranking for recently elected (1983) full member of the Politburo
Shcherbitskiy	Romanov	Senior secretary...now far outranked by Gorbachev
Solomentsev	Aliyev	First Deputy Premier...moved up
Ponomarev		Spoke out of turn last year due to illness
Kunayev	Shcherbitskiy	Ukrainian party chief...slipping: preceded Grishin in 1979 and Solomentsev last year
Aliyev	Kunayev	Kazakh party chief...moved down
Vorotnikov	Vorotnikov	RSFSR Premier...junior and lowest ranking full member of Politburo
	Ponomarev	Secretary and senior among candidate Politburo members
Kuznetsov		Vice President equivalent
Dolgikh	Shevardnadze	Georgian party chief...moved up a notch among candidate members
Shevardnadze	Dolgikh	Candidate Politburo member and party secretary...slipped a notch
Chebrikov	Chebrikov	KGB Chief and candidate Politburo member
Demichev	Demichev	Culture Minister and candidate Politburo member
Ryzhkov	Rusakov	Secretary for bloc relations, former Brezhnev aide...moved up
Kapitonov	Zimyanin	Secretary for propaganda and ideology...moved up
Zimyanin	Kapitonov	Secretary for light industry and consumer goods...slipped a notch
Rusakov	Ligachev	Secretary for cadres...moved up
Ligachev	Ryzhkov	Secretary and head of Central Committee's Economics Department...slipped substantially

*Note: Leaders are listed in the reverse order from that in which they spoke. By long established tradition, the lowest ranking leader speaks first and the highest ranking leader speaks last.

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